

# Proposal for a Remote Sensing Support project as part of FRA 2010

## Draft recommendations – for plenary consideration Fri 16 June

Based on ad-hoc working group with 26 Kotka V participants and subsequent discussions.

### 1. Rationale for a global remote sensing project

Currently, FAO requests data on the total extent of forest at each FRA reporting interval which enables the estimation of the overall change in forest area. **It was noted that** there is an important need, expressed by several conventions including UNFCCC and CBD that are significant users of FRA results, to improve the estimates of, in particular, deforestation and afforestation/expansion of forests to enable a more complete understanding of what changes are occurring globally. **It was concluded that** this data is difficult to obtain and that only a few countries have adequate forest inventory data or monitoring systems in place to be able to collect and report reliable information on forest area change over time.

The proposal outlines a methodology using remote sensing, in combination with other information and local expertise, to provide estimates of afforestation/expansion of forests and deforestation over time. **It was concluded that** this is a worthwhile objective and that the project should focus on results and maps for those areas where other sources of data are weak or non-existent. It was emphasised that remote sensing of forest cover and change is only effective if properly calibrated with field data and that this should be an integral part of the study.

**It was concluded that** the proposal is also an opportunity for technology transfer and capacity building in countries with limited resources or experience of forest monitoring. This could provide valuable development of national inventory systems and help strengthen regional cooperation in the use of remote sensing.

**It was noted that** several inter-governmental and non-governmental initiatives to generate similar information exist. It was concluded that it would be relevant to strengthen the contributions from the FRA process in this area, thus ensuring involvement of forestry experts and validation of results by government agencies.

### 2. Relationship with national forest inventories

While the project would report only on regional, biome and global levels, there was concern from a few participants from countries with established national forest inventories that the approach may not be as accurate as existing national methods and may also contradict country data as well as duplicate efforts, which may undermine confidence in existing national forest inventory systems. Further, a risk was perceived that resources for national monitoring initiatives could become more difficult to motivate. However, interest and support was strong from participants from countries where forest inventories are less well developed, and where national processes could be assisted and stimulated by the project. The project should therefore focus on those regions first.

There was concern that, for large countries, the project could be used to generate separate sets of numbers for forest extent and change from those provided by countries through their own methods. To avoid this **it was requested that** the project outputs be clearly specified to report at the regional level or greater and **it**

**was recommended that** the project implementation be integrated into or coordinated with existing NFI methods with the intention to avoid conflicting results and that FRA National Correspondents review results.

**It was recommended that** FAO request information on deforestation and afforestation/expansion of forests directly from those countries that already have this information, and where this may be preferred as an alternative to implementing the project over these territories. Consideration should be given to streamlining these results where this information is available and compatible from UNFCCC country reports.

### **3. Methodology and implementation**

There were several technical and methodological issues that needed either better explanation or clear demonstration of the effectiveness if the FRA Working paper on Remote Sensing Assessment for FRA 2010 (May 2006) is revised or through the proposed remote sensing expert meeting. **It was requested that** examples of how the techniques had been applied in previous projects to provide statistical estimates and maps of forest area dynamics could be used to quickly allay these concerns, or a pilot project should be undertaken to demonstrate the proposed methodology. Other issues raised in comments by National Correspondents such as cross-checking the MODIS cover map and LANDSAT statistics and backward change detection should be considered by the proposed remote sensing expert meeting to confirm the project methodology or refine it before implementation.

**It was requested that** the project make clear the confidence limits or scale limitations of results and strongly discourage presentation of maps or results outside these. Public access to statistics generated by the project should only be provided at regional (multi-country) or greater and not for individual countries.

The costs of the project were not provided in the draft proposal with the result that the working group was not able to determine whether the outputs of the project would be good value for money spent. **It was requested that** FAO provide estimates of the costs and proposed options for funding of the project to all national correspondents. The project may involve time and effort from country NFI staff. **It was recommended that** the project proposal should clarify how countries would be engaged and how much time and resources will be involved so that countries can consider the implications on their workloads and costs.

### **4. Follow-up**

Some participants wanted some extra time to consider the proposal more fully and consult with others back in their countries. **It was agreed that** further written inputs from national correspondents would be considered in the project design and **it was requested that** if there are any further comments by national correspondents, they be provided to FAO by 31 July 2006.

**It was recommended that** a representative of the FRA National Correspondents (or a nominee) attend the proposed remote sensing expert meeting to further refine the project to provide input to the process and add relevant information as to how the National Forest Inventory data and processes can contribute to the project. National Correspondents should be kept informed of the development of the project and of any major results.

In summary, the FRA Expert Consultation recommends that these comments be used to refine and help implement the project and the group was cautiously optimistic that this project could play a potentially positive supportive role to the assist participating countries provide improved information to the next global FRA in 2010.